

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2638

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 2584

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FOR AF/LOUGHRAN

EO 11652:GDS

TAGS: BEXP, IV

SUBJ: LANG/SODESUCRE CONFLICT

REF: ABIDJAN 2579

1. MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE SAWADOGO AND SUBSEQUENTLY PRESIDENT HOUPHOET-BOIGNY TELEPHONED ME AT HOME EARLY THIS MORNING TO SAY THEY HAD JUST LEARNED OF LANG'S ACTION OF TURNING OFF IRRIGATION SYSTEM AT FERKESSEDOUGOU SUGAR COMPLEX. THEY REFERRED TO IT IN ANGER AS SABOTAGE AND CALLED ON ME TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO GET THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM REOPENED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE MINSITER SAID HE WOULD TAKE POLICE ACTION IF NECESSARY. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS A TERIBLE THING TO HAVE A SITUATION LIKE THIS INTERFERING WITH THE CLOSE AND FREINDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN IVORY COAST AND THE U.S. HE WAS PARTICULARLY ANGRY THAT LANG SHOULD DO THIS IN THE FACE OF AN AGREED MEDIATION PLAN. HE SAID THAT LANG MAY HAVE SOME VALID FINANCIAL CLAIMS WHICH WERE NOT COVERED IN THE ORIGINAL CONTRACT BUT THAT THOSE SHOULD BE DETERMINED BY MEDIATION AND, IF NECESSARY, BY ARBITRATION AND NOT BY STRONG-ARM TACTICS.

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WM I EXPLAINED THAT I HAD ALREADY TRIED TO DISSUADE LANG FROM

TAKING THIS ACTION, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY HAD AGREED TO THE PROPOSED MEDIATION EFFORT BY DAVID MORSE, BUT LANG FELT THAT IF WAS AGRIEVED IN THAT ITS SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL CLAIMS HAD BEEN IGNORED UNTIL NOW. I ALSO EXPLAINED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT WHAT HAD BEEN TURNED OFF WAS ABOUT 2/3 OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM, NOT THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

3. I HAVE NEVER HEARD PRESIDENT HOUPHOET OR MINISTER SAWADOGO SPEAK SO EXCITEDLY. THEY REPEATEDLY USE THE WORD "SABOTAGE" AND SAWADOGO COMPARED LANG'S ACTION TO THE SOVIETS DROPPING AN ATOMIC BOMB ON THE U.S. HE SAID THAT AT LEAST ONE YEAR'S SUGAR CROP UP THERE WOULD BE RUINED IF THE WATER WERE LEFT OFF.

4. SAWADOGO HAS CONVENED A MEETING OF LANG REPRESENTATIVE MARION WRIGHT AND THE PRESIDENT OF SODESUCRE KACOU IN HIS OFFICE THIS MORNING. ACTING DCM FERRITER IS ATTENDING MEETING. WE SHALL REPORT FURTHER.

5. I AM ATTEMPTING TO TELEPHONE RAY HOFKER OF ISC IN HOUSTON TO TELL HIM OF THIS SEVERE REACTION. HE HAD PHONED ME ON MARCH 26 AT WHICH TIME I HAD TOLD HIM THAT THE ACTION LOOKED PUNITIVE TO PEOPLE HERE, INCLUDING THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, BUT HE PROFESSED NOT TO KNOW WHETHER THE ACTION WOULD IN FACT TURN OFF ALL IRRIGATION ON THE COMPLETED 2/3 OF THE SYSTEM OR ONLY DO IT PIECE BY PIECE. WE LEARNED YESTERDAY EVENING FROM MARION WRIGHT THAT THE ACTION HAD IN FACT TURNED OFF ALL IRRIGATION ON THE COMPLETED 2/3. WRIGHT TOLD FERRITER THAT IT WOULD BE TURNED OFF FOR TWO MONTHS WHILE THEY COMPLETED REPAIRS AND TESTING. OBVIOUSLY THIS WOULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE THE CANE CROP. WRIGHT HAD ALSO BEEN INSTRUCTED BY ISC TO TURN OFF THE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM BUT HAD NOT YET DONE SO.

6. WILL REPORT RESULTS OF FURTHER CONVERSATIONS AND MEETINGS ASAP.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: IN MEANTIME, BELIEVE IT CRITICAL TO US RELATIONS WITH IVORY COAST, FUTURE AMERICAN BUSINESS ACTIVITY HERE AND HOPE FOR REASONABLE MEDIATION MISSION THAT DEPARTMENT CONVINCE ISC, WHETHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH DAVID MORSE, TO REOPEN IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND UNDERTAKE REPAIRS AND TESTING ON A CONFIDENTIAL

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PIECEMEAL RATHER THAN WHOLE SALE BASIS. ISC/ LANG APPEARS FINANCIALLY DESPERATE, BUT MEASURES THEY HAVE TAKEN WILL NOT HELP THEM TO RECUPERATE MONEY AND IN PROCESS WILL HURT ALL OF US.
SMITH

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